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**CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNITY:
A SAMOAN CASE STUDY**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Deborah Colleen Gough BAppSc, GradDipAdEd, MSocChgDev(Dist)

Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies and School of Social
Sciences, Media & Communication

2009

CERTIFICATION

I, Deborah Colleen Gough, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Deborah Colleen Gough

31 August 2009

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GLOSSARY OF SAMOAN WORDS

The words included in this list are those only that appear in the text of this thesis. They are generally as explained to me by those Samoans I met during my study. Alternatively I came to understand the meaning of these words via the work of others studying in the field. Where this is the case their contribution is acknowledged in the text.

<i>‘Aiga</i>	family
<i>‘Aiga potopoto</i>	extended family
<i>Afakasi</i>	term to describe child of mixed parentage, ‘half-cast’
<i>Ala</i>	established mobility pathways
<i>Ali‘i</i>	‘high chief’
<i>Alofa</i>	love
<i>Fa’aaloalo</i>	respect
<i>Fa’alavelave</i>	obligation to meet an occasion such as funeral
<i>Fa’amatai</i>	the way of the chiefs (responsible for polity)
<i>Fa’apalagi</i>	following European ways
<i>Fa’aSamoa</i>	the ‘Samoan Way’, Samoan culture
<i>Fa’ataupati</i>	Slap or mosquito dance
<i>Fale tele</i>	customary meetinghouse, also faletele
<i>Fale</i>	traditional dwelling
<i>Fiafia</i>	celebration
<i>‘Ie toga</i>	fine mats
<i>Lapa lapa</i>	high-energy Samoan dance
<i>Malaga</i>	formal journey, visiting group
<i>Maliu</i>	funeral
<i>Malu</i>	female tattoo above the knee

<i>Mana</i>	spirit, spiritual awareness, divine power
<i>Matai</i>	head of 'aiga (colloquially called 'chief')
<i>Nuu</i>	village
<i>Pakea</i>	New Zealand Maori for non- Maori person
<i>Palagi</i>	European, foreigner, white person, also pa'apalagi
<i>Pe'a</i>	traditional male tattoo from waist to knee
<i>Siva</i>	dance
<i>Suegatupe</i>	fundraising for a specific occasion
<i>Tafao</i>	to wander (about)
<i>Tala</i>	Samoan dollar (roughly 50 AUD cents)
<i>Tamali'i</i>	high chief/s, also ali'i
<i>Tatau</i>	tattoo
<i>Tauaaluga</i>	final siva (dance)
<i>Taulima</i>	tattoo on upper arm
<i>Taupou</i>	daughter of a high chief
<i>Tautua</i>	to provide service
<i>Tufuga</i>	tattooist (traditional)
<i>Tulafale</i>	orator/s chief
<i>Usita'i</i>	obedience
<i>Va'a</i>	social space related to place, distance and connection

ABSTRACT

Understanding the impact of global influences on the 'local' is fundamental to the study of social and cultural transformation. Using Samoa as a case study this research seeks to engage in this debate by critiquing the impact of contemporary globalisation on an indigenous culture. Samoa was chosen as a case study because of its global engagement and because its culture, *fa'aSamoa*, is celebrated for resilience. The Samoan people, like many Pacific Islanders, are renowned for their mobility. After World War II sojourns turned into more permanent journeys, however, when increasing numbers of Samoans responded to offshore opportunities. What resulted was the formation of a vibrant Samoan community across the Pacific Rim. Exploring the nexus between this 'transnational corporation of kin' and the impact on contemporary Samoan society is at the core of this thesis. In so doing this study engages with broader debates around development, modernity and cultural transformation.

The primary research data for the study was gathered through interviews with Samoans in New Zealand, Australia, USA and Samoa. Interview questions centered on migration history and motivation, identity, life in the diaspora and cultural changes. Supplementary data was sourced via public internet sites, artwork, novels, poetry, music, documentary film and newspapers. In order to critique cultural change, whereby teasing out points of tension and negotiation, I examined what were judged to be indicative areas of susceptibility: the traditional system of governance, *fa'amatai*, the shifts in motivations behind people's decision to migrate and changes around personal, group and community identity.

The findings are detailed in four chapters focusing on changing forms of cultural enactment, shifts in motivation behind emigration, issues of identity and a specific chapter on youth 'inbetweenness'. Complexity has increased across all sectors of the Samoan community. In particular the *fa'amatai* governance system is under increasing pressure, with some questioning its capacity to negotiate the added burden. Most, however, continued to express confidence, pointing to its on-going flexibility and increasing openness. Given

the centrality of this system to *fa'aSamoa* the implications are highly significant. The impact of shifting attitudes and behaviour around emigration, and changing ideas about identity and 'connectivity' were, likewise, found to have the potential to devastate *fa'aSamoa*. It is ultimately concluded, however, that Samoans will continue their process of strategic adaptation and that *fa'aSamoa* will continue to hold relevance and provide guidance.

The implications of this research go beyond the bounds of the Samoan case study. First noted is the need to culturally contextualise studies and next, the importance of seeking out and encompassing indigenous knowledge. There are implications also for our understanding of development. The findings of this study highlight the need also to recognise the ongoing place of tradition in the lives of indigenous peoples everywhere, even those who have 'reached' a state of modernity. Finally the importance of facilitating strong transnational networks is stressed. Maintaining pathways will assist the network to remain strong which, in turn, has implications for the economic, political and social wellbeing of those living within it *and* for the region as a whole.

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